NETWORK NEWS

Neighborhood Networks Week 2006: Strength Through Unity

DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS TO AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES

The Mt. Zion A.M.E. Apartments Resource Center in Florence, South Carolina, celebrated Neighborhood Networks Week 2005 with a community fair.

Neighbors. We might run into them while checking the mail. Or, we might give them a quick wave as we rush off to catch the bus. Or, we may smile in their direction as we haul bags of groceries to the front door.

Neighbors. They are the foundation of a strong community, and yet, in today's busy world, we often must sacrifice the time we spend getting to know our neighbors and building lasting and beneficial relationships.

Neighborhood Networks Week 2006 focuses on the vital role neighbors play in building stronger communities. With the theme, *Uniting Neighbors. Strengthening Communities,* the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) encourages centers across the country to use this weeklong celebration as an opportunity to bring neighbors together and strengthen the community. By participating in national events and hosting local events, centers can emphasize how strong neighbor-to-neighbor relationships lead to stronger communities.

Great Expectations

In 2000, HUD launched Neighborhood Networks Week to celebrate the Initiative's fifth anniversary and its growth and success in helping residents of HUD multifamily properties move toward self-sufficiency. During that first weeklong celebration, only a handful of centers joined the national celebration and hosted local events.

Five years later, HUD had even more to celebrate about Neighborhood Networks—and it was not alone. During Neighborhood Networks Week 2005, more than 400 centers across the country hosted community events—the highest level of participation ever. In 2006, HUD is expecting even more centers to join the summer celebration that will take place July 31–August 5.

This year, centers are challenged to tap into their creativity and enthusiasm to develop events and activities that reach out to the surrounding community, build broad support and involvement, increase community awareness about the Initiative, and highlight the impressive achievements and value of Neighborhood Networks centers nationwide.

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A Cause for Celebration

HUD observes Neighborhood Networks Week each year to acknowledge thousands of residents, property owners and managers, partners, volunteers, HUD staff, and others who help make Neighborhood Networks what it is today—a successful community-based initiative.

Centers are encouraged to sponsor local events, such as grand openings, job and health fairs, open houses, and community outreach days, to strengthen bonds with the Initiative's stakeholders, build relationships with potential partners, and showcase a center's contributions to the larger community. The events highlight how center programs promote self-sufficiency by creating employment and job-training opportunities, advancing literacy, and improving computer access.

With a variety of events and activities centers can:

- Honor residents, center staff, volunteers, and partners.

- Highlight job-training and educational opportunities.

- Increase resident involvement and public awareness of the Initiative.

- Foster and strengthen community relations.

- Attract new partners and volunteers.

- Engage residents and families in educational, social, and other rewarding events.

Centers are also invited to participate in national events such as Web casts and Web chats.

Help Is Here

There are several available resources to help centers plan and host engaging events that will unite the neighborhood and strengthen the community. Whether it's a one-day special event or a series of events, centers can tap the following resources for guidance or assistance:

- **The Neighborhood Networks Information Center.** Call the Information Center toll free at (888) 312–2743 for planning tips, examples of successful events, and contact information for local HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators.

- **Center stakeholders.** Seek event ideas and assistance from center staff, residents, and partners.

- **Other centers.** Collaborate with other Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia to develop shared events.

- *Neighborhood Networks Week 2006 Event Planning Guide.* Filled with event ideas, strategies, and tips, this publication provides guidance and resources to plan and host successful events.

Two Celebrations…One Event

Once again, National Night Out (Tuesday, August 1, 2006) coincides with Neighborhood Networks Week.

Last year, 57 Neighborhood Networks centers participated in National Night Out events.

For more information on National Night Out, visit http://www.nationalnightout.org/.

- **Neighborhood Networks Web site.** Visit the Initiative's Web site at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org* and click on the historical information link to view press releases, articles, and photos of past Neighborhood Networks Week events.

Register Today

Make sure that HUD recognizes your efforts and enthusiasm by registering to host a Neighborhood Networks Week event.

Complete the registration form at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org* or in the *Neighborhood Networks Week 2006 Event Planning Guide.* Centers can also call the Neighborhood Network Information Center toll free at (888) 312–2743 or TTY (800) 483–2209 to register by telephone. Online registration is encouraged. ⬛

Neighborhood Networks Week: A Time to Shine

Last summer, more than 400 Neighborhood Networks centers hosted local events—from informal open houses for residents to full-blown community festivals—in celebration of Neighborhood Networks Week 2005. This year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is expecting even more centers to participate in the weeklong celebration that provides centers the perfect opportunity to promote their programs and services and highlight their progress.

Want to host an event for Neighborhood Networks Week 2006 but don't know where to begin? Perhaps one of the following examples will help you get the party started.

Westview Valley Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center Greensboro, North Carolina

The 100-unit Westview Valley Apartments is home to many families with children. So when Center Director Maria Chadmon began planning the events the center would host in celebration of Neighborhood Networks Week 2005, she knew the events not only had to interest adult residents, they also had to be something younger residents would consider fun. To ensure that the center offered something for everyone, Chadmon and her team planned two major events, in addition to smaller daily events.

To kick off the festivities, the center planned a block party to not only celebrate Neighborhood Networks Week, but to also participate in National Night Out. "Every year, we try to do something for National Night Out, which focuses on crime and drug prevention and strengthening neighborhood spirit," said Chadmon. "When we realized that National Night Out was going to take place during Neighborhood Networks Week, we saw this as an opportunity to combine two celebrations into one big event."

And big it was. More than 250 people attended the block party that included safety demonstrations from the local fire department, door prizes, and food—lots of food.

"We supplied 50 pizzas and soft drinks and water, and then we received all kinds of donations from our many partners," said Chadmon. "We had food everywhere. And if the food didn't get them to join the party, we had lots of great door prizes—from amusement park passes to certificates for free lunches, bowling, and games of mini-golf."

Officers from the Greensboro Police Department also presented awards to the center for its efforts in strengthening the community. During the block party, officers mingled with attendees as part of the goal of National Night Out to build stronger police-community partnerships.

Chadmon attributes much of the center's success to the solid partnerships she has cultivated with local businesses and government agencies during the 11 years she has worked at the center.

Chadmon's knowledge of local media outlets and promotional

Pico Union Housing Learning Center hosts a community fair during Neighborhood Networks Week.

venues also helped to increase awareness of the event. To promote the events, Chadmon wrote and submitted community event notices to the local television and radio stations. The local television station even sent a crew to the block party to cover the event.

In addition to the block party, the center also held a more low-key community health fair that offered free screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, HIV/AIDS, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Information on a variety of health topics also was distributed to attendees.

Kvasager Learning Center Grand Forks, North Dakota

In past years, the LaGrave Learning Center and the Kvasager Learning Center (formerly the Continental Homes Learning Center) hosted high-energy community events as part of their Neighborhood Networks Week celebration. Craig Knudsvig, client services manager, and his team worked hard to ensure that the centers' weeklong celebrations offered something for everyone.

Neighborhood Networks Week: A Time to Shine (continued from page 3)

Arvin Kvasager speaks to guests at renaming ceremony.

In 2005, Knudsvig and his team departed from the community carnivals and bike safety rodeos that have been part of past Neighborhood Networks Week celebrations—opting to host events that honored the accomplishments of those who have made the goal of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative a reality for many residents.

The centers, which are the result of a partnership between the Grand Forks Housing Authority and Grand Forks Homes, Inc., kicked off their Neighborhood Networks Week celebration by renaming the Continental Homes Learning Center the Kvasager Learning Center, in honor of Arvin Kvasager. As a member of the Grand Forks Housing Authority Board of Commissioners for 38 years, Kvasager was instrumental in the construction of the first assisted housing complex in Grand Forks—Continental Homes—and was a major supporter of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative.

At the renaming ceremony, Joel Manske, HUD's North Dakota field office director; representatives from North Dakota's state legislators' offices; and Michael Brown, mayor of Grand Forks, paid tribute to Kvasager's efforts. After presenting Kvasager with a plaque of appreciation, the center's new sign that bears his name was unveiled. Following the ceremony, guests attended a

reception that included tours of the center and its computer lab.

"Our goal was to keep the event low-key—in keeping with Arvin's style," said Knudsvig. "We wanted to honor Arvin and his accomplishments with dignity, highlighting the range of his service to the community. The renaming of the center was very meaningful to Arvin, and his children who live out of town made special trips to share in the event."

New sign for the Kvasager Learning Center.

Renaming a center and honoring a key supporter of Neighborhood Networks was not the only celebration the centers hosted during Neighborhood Networks Week 2005. The center staff held a grand opening for The Link, an 8,000-square-foot, multiuse community space that connects the 135 residents of the Oak Manor and Cherry Heights apartment complexes. The Link offers a media center that provides residents with the use of three new computers with DSL Internet access, an exercise space, a salon, a kitchen, a dining room/community room, an activity/meeting room, a pool table and piano, a convenience store, and offices for the service coordinators.

Following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, more than 200 attendees

enjoyed a meal, mingled with residents, and toured the multimillion-dollar facility.

"This was the public portion of the launch of The Link," said Knudsvig. "Two weeks before the grand opening, we held a residents-only open house and ice cream social, and one week before the grand opening, we provided residents with the opportunity to show family members the new space and join us for hamburgers, hot dogs, and dishes prepared by the residents."

In addition to these two major events, the centers hosted potluck dinners at both centers that included coloring contests for the children and door prizes, including a refurbished laptop that was awarded to one child at each center. Members of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) also presented a life-size puppet show one day during the weeklong celebration.

No matter what type of event you choose to host in celebration of Neighborhood Networks Week, plan an event that suits the interests and lifestyle of residents. Planning an event that meets resident needs and wants will keep participation levels high—and have residents waiting for next year's celebration. ⬛

Residents participate in Neighborhood Networks Week meet and greet.

Regional Technical Assistance Workshops:
A Chance to Receive, Review, and Refresh

Sneak a peek at the typical Neighborhood Networks stakeholders' "to do" list and you might see action items like:

- Identify the programs and classes residents need and want. Create a plan to deliver these services.
- Promote programs to increase resident participation and garner support from the community and potential partners.
- Build partnerships with local businesses and organizations.
- Secure funding.
- Hire staff/recruit volunteers.
- Connect residents with the latest technologies

And that's just the list for Monday.

Each year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides all those who work countless hours fulfilling the mission of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative with an opportunity to set aside the multi-page "to do" list and participate in a Regional Technical Assistance Workshop (RTAW) or a national conference.

Providing Information, Resources, and Opportunities from Coast to Coast

This year HUD hosted two RTAWs. The RTAWs are designed to address the specific needs of Neighborhood Networks stakeholders across the country. They offer expert-led sessions on a wide range of topics—from grantwriting and partnership development to recruiting volunteers and increasing resident participation to the latest technologies and techniques that are changing the workforce. In addition, RTAWs provide Neighborhood Networks stakeholders with the chance to step outside of their everyday routine, review their current work processes with a fresh perspective, and network with colleagues who may have faced or are struggling with the same challenges.

The Hyatt Regency Islandia Hotel in San Diego was the site of the first 2006 RTAW held on April 5–7. The San Diego RTAW, which was attended by more than 150 Neighborhood Networks stakeholders, focused on creating personalized tools and networking. The RTAW began with participants completing a needs assessment for their center. Participants then used this information to build a customized toolkit that they can put to use upon return to their center. Toolkit items included sample resident surveys, plans, program curricula, completed 501(c)(3) tax-exemption forms, and asset maps.

The second RTAW addressed the needs of the more experienced Neighborhood Networks stakeholder. The morning sessions, held at the Radisson Hotel Boston, concentrated on operational and sustainability issues, such as fundraising, program planning, partnership development, volunteer recruitment, and Web site development, while the afternoon sessions showcased new technology—such as wireless access, digital storytelling, technology for persons with disabilities, and using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the Global Positioning System (GPS)—that centers can use to help residents move toward self-sufficiency. Held at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the afternoon sessions were sponsored by the Massachusetts Regional Consortium (MassIMPACT) and the Neighborhood Networks National Consortium (NNNC).

The Boston RTAW was also the site of the NNNC's annual meeting. All 10 board members attended the meeting to discuss the progress that has been made since the NNNC was launched in June 2005 at the Neighborhood Networks National Training Conference in Orlando, Florida.

A two-day grantwriting workshop was offered prior to each RTAW. In Boston, participants were also invited to attend a pre-RTAW two-day Digital Storytelling Boot Camp.

"Neighborhood Networks stakeholders are very busy people, and finding time to attend a three-day workshop requires a great deal of schedule shuffling," said Delores Pruden, director, Neighborhood Networks. "But I have no doubt that everyone who participated in these RTAWs has taken what they learned, applied it to their daily professional lives, and are more efficient and effective." NN

And the Winner Is . . .

In early spring, Neighborhood Networks encouraged HUD multifamily Neighborhood Networks centers to invite their resident-artists of all ages to turn words into art and participate in the annual Neighborhood Networks Poster Contest. Contestants could use markers, paints, crayon, or colored pencils to create a visual version of this year's Neighborhood Networks Week theme, *Uniting Neighbors. Strengthening Communities.*

With more than 150 entries submitted, selecting the winners was difficult. However, some entries truly did shine. Posters were judged on originality, artistic merit, and expression of the theme. One poster was chosen as the overall winner, and will be printed and distributed to all centers for Neighborhood Networks Week, July 31–August 5, 2006. First-, second-, and third-place winners also were awarded in each of the four categories (children, youth, adults, and seniors). All winning posters will be posted on the Neighborhood Networks Web site (*www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org*).

Neighborhood Networks would like to thank all of those artists who submitted an entry.

Overall Winner

Iris Jones
The Pines Learning Tree Neighborhood Networks Center
Knoxville, Tennessee

It took Iris Jones just four hours to create a winning concept. With no formal training in drawing or painting, and without ever having

painted anything before, Jones just wanted to create something that would speak to individuals of all ages and express this year's Neighborhood Networks Week theme *Uniting Neighbors. Strengthening Communities.* She

Iris Jones, overall winner of the annual Neighborhood Networks Week Poster Contest.

was pleased with what she had created—and so were the more than 150 Regional Technical Assistance Workshop (RTAW) participants who voted for her poster as the overall winner. Jones' creation was chosen over a record high of 158 entries.

"I am very pleased with winning," said Jones. "It encourages me to pursue painting as a hobby. I would like to thank the manager of The Pines Apartment, Marilyn Wooliver, for bringing the contest to our attention. She has been wonderful in providing our community with various activities. These events have brought us closer together as neighbors. We feel as if we are family."

Individual Category Winners

Children

Ages 6–12

First Place

Walter
Sister Mary Lucy Neighborhood Networks Center
Denver, Colorado

After working for an hour on a design for the Neighborhood Networks Week Poster Contest, 12-year-old Walter felt positive about his chances for winning. His feelings were not off the mark—as his poster captured first place in the children's category. "I feel great and happy about winning," said Walter. "I am thankful to Neighborhood Networks and Sister Mary Lucy Neighborhood Networks Center for the opportunity to be a part of this contest, but I really would like to thank my mom because she encouraged me to participate and I did it!"

Second Place

Travon
Lazard Education Center
Lafayette, Louisiana

Third Place

Abok
Sister Mary Lucy Neighborhood Networks Center
Denver, Colorado

And the Winner Is . . . (continued from page 6)

Youth

Ages 13–17

First Place

Javonte
St. James Manor Computer Learning Center
Omaha, Nebraska

"Family, God, Jesus, and everyone else who believes in me." These are the things that Javonte acknowledges for his success in the Neighborhood Networks Week Poster Contest. Without any formal training, this extraordinary 13-year-old, who has been painting since the first grade, received first place in the youth category. Javonte created his masterpiece in only two days.

Second Place

Jenny
Castle Square Tenants Organization, Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts

Third Place

Sabrina
West Durango Plaza Learning Center
San Antonio, Texas

Adults

Ages 18–64

First Place

Josie Agridano
Laredo Manor Apartments
Laredo, Texas

For two weeks, Josie Agridano put her "whole heart, dedication, and love" into creating a poster for the Neighborhood Networks Week Poster Contest, and when she was finished, Agridano said she had "a magnificent piece of love." Josie has been drawing and painting all of her life, but has no formal training. "I felt good when I arrived at the center and was told that I'd won," said Agridano. "All of my neighbors were there and Mrs. Imelda Santos, our center director, asked them to clap and cheer for me. I wanted to cry. I told them that the painting was done for everyone—we all won."

Second Place

Janeth Bennett
Northland Computer Learning Center
Dayton, Ohio

Third Place

April Dumford
Northland Computer Learning Center
Dayton, Ohio

Seniors

Ages 65 and Older

First Place

Patricia Dressler
Ingleside Retirement Apartments
Wilmington, Delaware

When Patricia Dressler was 8 years old, she received a blackboard for Christmas, and has been drawing ever since. While designing her entry for the 2006 Neighborhood Networks Week Poster Contest, Dressler had a simple rule of thumb: draw on her life experiences and remind herself that winning was not the point. This enabled her to be free to develop the computer-as-a-cosmic-rainbow concept. Her strategy proved successful and Dressler's poster took first place in the seniors category. "Winning has never been a big thing for me ever," said Dressler. "Finding ways to use my strength and get back on track, and the thinking process that went into this poster, was challenging for me. It was a valuable risk, and I loved the whole process."

Second Place

Green Park Terrace Focus Group
The Knowledge Center @ The Terrace
Indianapolis, Indiana

Third Place

Meri Koropova
Golda Meir House Computer Learning Center
Auburndale, Massachusetts

2006 Calendar of Events

Conference Calls

July 25—*Making it Work! Developing Your Center's Workforce Development Program*

August 15—*Building and Mending Relationship Bridges: Conflict Resolution for Center Staff and the Community*

September 19—*Heard Any Good Stories Lately? Neighborhood Networks Success Stories*

Consortia Conference Calls

September 12—*Basics in Consortia Board Development*

Conferences at Which Neighborhood Networks Will Be Exhibiting

July 27–29—CTCNet Annual Conference Washington, D.C.

Neighborhood Networks Week

July 31 through August 5, 2006

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Room 6124
Washington, DC 20410–6000

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use $300

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